

*Life Story of Miss
Mae McKenzie*



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TIME is the story writer of millions of human lives. Sometimes the lives are long in years, but the story is short; and sometimes the lives are short in years, and the story to be told is long—not so long perhaps in words as in a few deeds or even one deed that reaches away into eternity and helps thousands to live and act nobly. Our story is about one whose years of service were not long, but whose life and deeds were golden and whose crowning days were her last upon earth.

The story that we are to tell is about Miss Mae McKenzie, one of our first deaconesses. She was born into a Christian home down in the little town of Americus, Ga., and the being a missionary deaconess was not to her a sudden revelation from above, for she grew up a missionary. As a child she was an active member in her home Church and served in all of the offices of the Junior Missionary Society. She was so interested and capable that when the members of the Adult Missionary Society of the Americus District wanted anything done and there was no one else to do it, they would laughingly say: "Well, Mae McKenzie or Lee Crittenden [who afterwards also became a deaconess] will do it for us."

When Mae McKenzie was quite a young girl, her mother was taken away, and she

became the home maker. This meant the indefinite postponement of her ambition to secure a college education. Finally, when the family cares grew less, again she found her joy and delight in the work of the Church. During the time that Rev. George



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Matthews was pastor of her Church God came to her in a very special way and spoke to her heart, and anew she consecrated her life with a great willingness to serve wherever God might call.

In May of 1900 Mrs. MacDonell, the Secretary of our Woman's Home Mission Board, was visiting in Americus; and Brother Matthews told her that Miss Mae McKenzie very much desired a conference with her. The Secretary says that when she recalls the incident of their meeting her heart glows with the thought of God's unusual presence with them. At the church the previous Sunday a call had come for a worker among the child widows of India, and Miss Mae McKenzie had been singled out by the speaker as the one that God needed for that work. The question she asked the Secretary was: "Is that a call from God?" The Secretary answered: "If you have never thought seriously of going to the foreign field as a missionary, there is every reason why you should do so now." The result of that conference was the entrance of Miss McKenzie into training for service. The field and the time were left for God's later direction.

She went to Wesleyan College and was there for three years. This required some courage, for she was older than most of the other students. While there she was a leader in the religious life of the school and was a benediction to every member. During her third year she became very ill with pneumonia, which was followed by serious heart trouble, and the doctor told her frankly

that she could never go to the foreign field.

The family had moved to Rome, Ga. When she tried to plan for her life work, the people of the cotton mill district in Rome began to make their appeal. This led to her opening work among them. As she worked she became stronger and began to think of the possibilities of becoming a deaconess. She wrote to her friend, the Home Mission Secretary, who in turn wrote to a friend in Macon. By return mail there came a check to bear the cost for the first year of her training in the Scarritt Bible and Training School. She finished her course and was consecrated to the order of deaconess, although it was well known that her delicate health would not permit of an appointment where the work would be strenuous.

Her first appointment came in the year that the Woman's Board of Home Missions held its meeting in Houston, Tex. There came before the Deaconess Committee at that time the pastor of the Church at Crossett, Ark. He came asking for a deaconess to work among the people of the lumber camp in Crossett. The description of what he wanted was met in Miss Mae McKenzie, the only lack being the physical strength. When Miss Mary Helm, a member of the committee, turned to him with a searching question as to the possibility of using a great spirit in a physical body which was not strong enough to meet ordinary life, he promptly replied: "We can use a frail deaconess at Crossett better than you can use her in the city, because she will have an automobile and can



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go from camp to camp, whereas in a city she would be obliged to walk." When the pastor left, the members looked from one to the other and with hushed voices said: "Mae McKenzie." And this was her appointment.

It was with a heart of joy that she went to her first appointment, joy because her dream was made real; and now she was to serve a people who needed her and to serve the Church as one of its messengers.

Soon she came to love the people, and they in turn loved her gentle spirit, which attracted even the rough men of the camp, making them always kind and considerate when in her presence. She organized the boys into a Baraca Class and taught them in a night school. She went in and out among the homes of the camp, acting as friend to the mothers and big sister to the children and frequently playing nurse to the little sick babies. Often on her visits from house to house she would have to stop and sit down on the lumber to rest. Everywhere the people saw her she was greeted with the loving words, "Our deaconess, Miss Mae."

For eighteen happy months she lived in the lumber camp, and these months made record of a great service of loving deeds; but at their end the heart trouble returned, and soon she and every one else knew that she could not recover.

Then came the recording of the crowning deeds of her life, for she was unafraid as she approached the day when she should meet her Master, and her whole thought was for those she loved. A friend who writes of her three last hours says:

"As soon as it became known that our beloved deaconess was dying the people began to come to see her. She sat up in bed and called each one by name and had messages for every one. Her Baraca boys were all there and many other young men whom she had tried in vain to get into her class. Her overwhelming desire to save souls stayed with her to the last, and a number of them

promised to become Christians. To one who said, 'I will try,' she said, 'Don't say "I will try," say "I will." Repeat it after me: "I can, and I will." ' The young man, with sobs, did say it. To numbers of others she gave like messages, while men, women, and children stood in awe and listened.

"Fully two hundred persons passed through her room during the three hours. She spoke to every one of them. It seemed to all of us to be a glimpse of heaven. She said over and over again: 'I always knew it would be all right, but I never knew it would be so sweet to go. It is so sweet; it is so sweet.'

"She wrought great good in Crossett during her work of a year and a half. She did more in her short stay than most people do in a lifetime.

"On the next afternoon her Baraca boys, wearing the arm bands she had given them Christmas, carried her to the church, where the service was held. The church could not hold the people. All classes came. Brother Hannon, the pastor, talked from Revelation xiv. 13. When he asked those of the boys who would stand with him and pledge themselves to be better and stronger men for her sake, it was a sight to make angels rejoice to see eighteen fine young men standing."

And Mae McKenzie, one of our pioneer deaconesses, out in a Western lumber camp, made the service of eighteen months stretch away into the years.

